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United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Security Council
Sixty-ninth year

Identical letters dated 29 January 2014 from the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General-Assembly and the President of the Security Council

I write to convey the grave concerns of the Government of the State of Palestine about the critical humanitarian situation of Palestine refugees in Syria. I have recently raised this matter before the Security Council, drawing attention to the grave impact of the ongoing conflict on the Palestine refugees in Syria, who continue to suffer death and injury, the destruction of their homes, dispossession and massive displacement.

Of the 540,000 Palestine refugees in Syria registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), more than half have been displaced inside Syria, while an estimated 80,000 have fled to neighbouring countries, mainly Lebanon and Jordan, as well as to other countries in the region. At this time, UNRWA reports that the conflict has overwhelmed most of the refugee camps, and almost all Palestine refugees in Syria are in need of emergency humanitarian assistance.

The plight of the thousands of Palestine refugees trapped in Al-Yarmouk camp in particular is shocking and inhumane. Prior to the onset of the crisis, Al-Yarmouk camp was home to over 160,000 Palestine refugees. When the conflict reached the camp in December 2012, at least 140,000 refugees fled. The estimated 18,000 Palestine refugees remaining in Al-Yarmouk have been besieged in the camp for months, with no access to essential foodstuffs and medicines, enduring extreme humanitarian hardship and suffering, including acute malnutrition and starvation. Due to ongoing violence in and around the area, numerous attempts to deliver food and medical aid to the camp since September 2013 have failed, with the exception of an UNRWA delivery of polio vaccine in December 2013 and the distribution of about 300 food parcels in the period from 18 to 21 January 2014.

Most disturbing are emerging reports, including by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), of the death of Palestine

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refugees in Al-Yarmouk camp, including children, women and men, including elderly persons, due to starvation, due to the desperate consumption of rotten food and due to lack of medical supplies for sick and injured civilians and for pregnant women trapped in the camp. The misery and suffering of the refugees is being further exacerbated by the lack of electricity and a severe water shortage in the camp. It is a humanitarian catastrophe requiring urgent international attention.

We urgently appeal for humanitarian access to the camp and to all civilians suffering in this conflict, in line with the relevant provisions of international humanitarian law. In this regard, we recall the statement by the President of the Security Council of 2 October 2013 (S/PRST/2013/15) regarding, inter alia, the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian emergency assistance, and stress the imperative of ensuring respect for the principles enshrined therein and of facilitating safe, unhindered humanitarian access to all civilians in need. Further in this regard, we reiterate our appeals for the exertion of all possible efforts to ensure the protection of the Palestine refugees and all civilians in Syria, in accordance with international humanitarian law, including ensuring the safe passage of those civilians who wish to leave Al-Yarmouk camp and other besieged areas. We further share the international community's hopes for a political solution to be found to end this horrific conflict.

We express deep regret over and mourn the tragic killing and injury of thousands of Palestine refugees throughout the period since the onset of this crisis. We also regret the killing and injury of UNRWA staff as they dedicatedly strived to perform their humanitarian duties. We recognize the efforts of UNRWA and other humanitarian organizations in providing emergency aid to the Palestine refugees in Syria, as well as those who have fled to Lebanon, Jordan and other countries. Moreover, while commending UNRWA for its emergency relief operations, it must also be recognized for its efforts to continue providing education to more than 47,000 Palestine refugee children in Syria and providing health care to the refugees, as well as continuing its youth development and community support programmes and water and sanitation services despite the prevailing difficult circumstances. We urge the international donor community to continue generously supporting UNRWA's vital humanitarian mission and to increase support where possible.

In closing, we stress that this tragic crisis reconfirms the extreme vulnerability of the Palestine refugees and the need for a just solution for their plight, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, including General Assembly resolution 194 (III), in the context of a lasting Palestinian-Israeli peace and in the context of a comprehensive regional peace, objectives to which the Palestinian leadership remains firmly committed and continues to exert all responsible efforts to achieve.

I would be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter distributed as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 51, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Dr. Riyad **Mansour**
Ambassador, Permanent Observer
of the State of Palestine to the United Nations